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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 000199

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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that PM Sharon's new government was narrowly approved in the Knesset Monday, 58-56, with 6 abstentions, despite no-confidence votes from 13 members of his own Likud party, thanks to support from outside the coalition by the Yahad faction (except Yossi Sarid, who abstained), and the abstention of two Israeli Arab Knesset members. One United Torah Judaism (UTJ) Knesset member, Meir Porush, who was slated to become deputy transportation minister, abstained; some media cited the belief of Knesset sources that he was instructed to do so by one of the rabbis on UTJ's Council of Torah Sages. Anti-disengagement Hatzofe bannered: "Transfer Government Underway Thanks to Arab and Left-Wing Votes." (The newspaper views the evacuation of settlements as an illegitimate transfer of Jews from their homes.) The media say that the new government's first test will come Wednesday when the proposed state budget for 2005 is brought before the plenum for a first reading. Maariv and other media say that despite Shas's current opposition to the government, Sharon has demonstrated optimism regarding Shas's inclusion in his coalition, following the victory of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen): Shas mentor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef could change his ruling on disengagement.

Leading media reported that Sharon is expected to telephone PA chairman-elect Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) today to congratulate him on Sunday's election victory. Yediot reported that Israel has offered to grant the Palestinians control of Ramallah, and later of other cities. Israel Radio reported that President Moshe Katsav called Abbas this morning to congratulate him, telling him he is interested in meeting with him after Sharon does. The station quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying at this morning's cabinet meeting that Israel must talk with PA representatives. Jerusalem Post quoted Abbas as saying Monday that the Palestinians "are ready for peace."

All media reported that President Bush reached out Monday to Abbas with a proposal for direct talks and a White House meeting, urging him to quickly bolster Palestinian security forces to take on militants. Bush praised Israel for letting Palestinian voters in Jerusalem have access to polling stations and said there were more steps Israel should take, citing the need for Israel "to fulfill its obligation on the withdrawal from the territories that it has pledged to withdraw from. He added that Israel "can play an important part in the development of the Palestinian state" and stressed the need for the Palestinian leadership to "consolidate security forces so that they can fight off those few who still have the desire to destroy Israel as part of their philosophy."

Ha'aretz reported that visiting Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) asked Sharon Monday why Israel is not evacuating the illegal settler outposts in the West Bank. The newspaper cited Sharon's reply that the public mood in Israel regarding the disengagement plan, and Palestinian terrorism, are making such a move difficult. Jerusalem Post reported that Sharon told Kerry that Abbas will be tested by how he stops terror, but that as a first step Israel will accept an internal Palestinian cease-fire. Jerusalem Post reported that Sen. John Kyl (R-AZ), the head of a visiting

Congressional delegation, called Monday for the new PA leadership to fight terrorism and incitement, and enact transparency in finances as a condition for receiving more U.S. aid.

All media reported that over 15,000 people attended a two hour-long anti-disengagement prayer rally opposite the Knesset on Monday. Maariv and Hatzofe reported that on Monday Police Commissioner Moshe Karadi, A-G Menachem Mazuz, and State Attorney Eran Shendar decided to take stronger measures against manifestations of violence expected to take place as the implementation of the disengagement plan starts. Among other proposed steps, quick trials would be conducted.

Maariv reported that according to one proposal, 3,000 Palestinian houses would be demolished to dig the trench proposed by the IDF in order to prevent the digging of tunnels under the Philadelphi route. Jerusalem Post reported that hundreds of Palestinian students attending a rally at Bir Zeit University on Monday called for more suicide attacks against Israel. The newspaper also reported that Sana al-Hibel, a woman from the Gaza Strip, called on Abbas to end the firing of Qassam rockets.

Israel Radio reported that this morning Qassam rockets and mortar shells were fired at Sderot and Gaza Strip settlements. There were no casualties. In a different development, Ha'aretz quoted senior Israeli defense officials monitoring Hizbullah activity as saying that the Shi'ite organization runs a "conveyor-belt" operation in the territories, as its goal is to create as many terrorist cells as possible, and Hizbullah is happy with even the smallest attacks.

Ha'aretz reported that Monday the UN declared that Hizbullah bears the main responsibility for the death of a French officer from IDF fire on Sunday. Ha'aretz reported that a military court sentenced a soldier who lied to Military Police and his commanding officers during a probe into the death of Tom Hurndall, a British International Solidarity Mission (ISM) volunteer, to five and a half months in jail. Ha'aretz reported that a bill circulating in the Palestinian Legislative Council stipulates that the PA's National Security Council will become the most influential PA body over the Palestinian government's security apparatus. Abbas will be "supreme commander" of the security forces, but unlike Yasser Arafat, he will not take part in the council's meetings.

A senior U.S. administration official was quoted as saying in an interview with Jerusalem Post that the U.S. does not believe Egypt is secretly developing nuclear weapons, despite a finding by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Egypt has been conducting experiments which the IAEA says could be part of a hidden nuclear weapons program.

Leading media reported that, for the seventh consecutive year, U.S., Turkish, and Israeli naval forces will hold a joint exercise today in the Mediterranean. Israel Radio notes that Jordan will send an observer to the maneuver.

Maariv reported that the Spanish government has invited representatives from Arab states and senior PA officials, but not Israeli officials, to attend a world summit on terror that will take place on the anniversary of the March 1, 2004 Madrid bombings.

Last night, Channel 10-TV broadcast a report by its team that flew with U.S. troops on an aid mission to Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: (January 11): "The victory of Fatah's candidate, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) ... is likely to be an important milestone in the efforts to obtain a halt to the violent conflict, and thereafter perhaps an agreement as well."

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Who would have believed that the silent civil majority that yearns for normalcy would at long last make its voice heard loudly in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority?"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot: "Sharon has the resoluteness, but he wants for votes. Abu Mazen has the votes, but many people doubt how resolute he is. The two of them are planning to make revolutionary changes in the Middle Eastern reality."

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz: "Abbas and Fatah's election victory can definitely be interpreted as a victory of the strategy of negotiations with Israel and establishing a state alongside it, and not instead of it."

Oslo accords architect Ron Pundak wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "The course steered by Abu Mazen could lead to peace and security in this region, but it takes two to tango.... Now more than ever, the key is in Israel's hands."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "A major goal for this coalition in general, and its religious members in particular, is to avert a civil war as Israelis are detached from communities they built with the government's encouragement."

Block Quotes:

I. "Partner For the Pullout -- and After"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (January 11): "The victory of Fatah's candidate, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), in the election for a new Palestinian Authority chairman is likely to be an important milestone in the efforts to obtain a halt to the violent conflict, and thereafter perhaps an agreement as well.... The new PA chairman was elected against the background of a new reality in the region and the world: four years of bloodshed, which resulted in many victims and heavy damage; an American government that is seeking a way out of the ongoing crisis in Iraq; and hints of a new direction in Syria. But more important than any of these is the change in Israel. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan, which has just received a boost in the form of a new government that includes Labor, is slated to dismantle all Israeli settlements and military installations in the Gaza Strip this year and transfer them to the Palestinians. This is a dramatic move that accords with the Palestinians' interests. Abu Mazen can integrate his plans for a cease-fire and the rehabilitation of the security services in Gaza with the PA's assumption of full responsibility for the Gaza Strip. Such integration will increase the odds of success for the disengagement, which is currently the most relevant diplomatic plan on the agenda of both parties to the conflict."

II. "The Voice of the Majority"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 11): "The masses that voted for Abu Mazen in the race for the president of the Palestinian Authority ... also voted, given the circumstances, against the ideology that Arafat nurtured for years. Arafat rejected democratic elections, rejected the establishment of a Palestinian governmental authority that would disarm the terror organizations, rejected genuine dialogue with Israel and rejected the establishment of a Palestinian state inside borders based on a realistic compromise. All of Arafat's rejections became central components in the platform on which Abu Mazen ran and won. And who would have believed that Fatah, a secular Palestinian political movement, which was eulogized by so many experts as washed out and as having capitulated to the frothing wave of Islamic extremism, would suddenly awaken from its coma, organize and achieve such an impressive victory in the elections? But historical surprises abound not only in the Palestinian arena, but in our arena as well. Who would have believed that the overtly left wing party Yahad would raise its hand in the Knesset in favor of a government led by Ariel Sharon, so that Sharon -- as the prime minister of a stable government -- might implement his plan to remove all Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip? Who would have believed that the silent civil majority that yearns for normalcy would at long last make its voice heard loudly in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority? This is a clear and practical voice that democratically defeats both Jewish messianism and Palestinian messianism. Those who did not believe, evidently, were people of little faith."

III. "Sharon and Abu Mazen: Together But Alone"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot (January 11): "This could have been an era of positive change. A new president was elected to the Palestinian Authority who he has consistently spoken out against terrorism and violence. The majority that he received gives him prestige in the world and a mandate to make changes at home. He needs a strong, self-assured Israeli government that will help him establish himself. Sharon has the resoluteness, but he wants for votes. Abu Mazen has the votes, but many people doubt how resolute he is. The two of them are planning to make revolutionary changes in the Middle Eastern reality. All provided that ['rebel' Likud Knesset Members] Madame Naomi Blumenthal and Monsieur Mickey Ratzon, not to mention Yehiel Hazan, deign to give them permission."

IV. "A Victory For the Two-State Approach"

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (January 11): "Mahmoud Abbas's impressive victory in the Palestinian Authority's presidential elections is to a large extent also a victory for the Fatah movement.... The Fatah movement has not only not disintegrated, but it appears to have pulled itself together and been strengthened.... This success for the movement is of enormous importance because it is the movement that led the Palestinian public and the PLO to recognize the state of Israel and stick to a 'two states for two peoples' strategy.... Abbas and Fatah's election victory can definitely be interpreted as a victory of the strategy of negotiations with Israel and establishing a state alongside it, and not instead of it. Even at the height of the suicide bombings, polls in the territories showed that the majority still believed that a two-state arrangement would be the best -- and the elections this week confirm that remains the overwhelmingly prevailing view."

V. "The Second Palestinian Revolution"

Oslo accords architect Ron Pundak wrote in Yediot Aharonot (January 11): "Abu Mazen's election to the presidency of the Palestinian Authority, and his new status at the head of the PLO are placing the Palestinians and their leadership at a new crossroads. The easier direction would be the continuation of the violent Arafat-style revolution. The more difficult course leads to an Abu-Mazen-style civilian revolution. In actual fact, we are already in the twilight zone between the two, but an opportunity for significant change has now been created. In this context, Israel can be compared to traffic lights.... The course steered by Abu Mazen could lead to peace and security in this region, but it takes two to tango. In order for the Palestinians to show restraint and considerable tolerance required of them, Israel must help Abu Mazen create an increasing number of positive stimuli. Alongside a true dialogue, a release of prisoners, the lifting of roadblocks, and a general change of attitude will help Abu Mazen turn the [Palestinian] street from violence and incitement into conciliation and a diplomatic solution, fighting and the war into a dialogue and peace, the first revolution into the second one. Now more than ever, the key is in Israel's hands. If we so want, we'll make Palestinian change possible. If we don't, we'll perpetuate war and terror."

VI. "Challenge and Promise"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (January 11): "The new government's most daunting goal will, of course, be to pull Israel out of the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria [i.e. the northernmost part of the West Bank], as has already been decided by the outgoing government and approved by the Knesset. That goal, however, could have been accomplished by a secular coalition. The reason such a configuration was not chosen was the great desire to avert civil strife, a goal that stands a better chance of being accomplished with at least some religious politicians on Sharon's bandwagon. It follows that a major goal for this coalition in general, and its religious members in particular, is to avert a civil war as Israelis are detached from communities they built with the government's encouragement."

KURTZER